

## MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

### 1. DOES THE MANIPUR DEER *CERVUS ELDI* EXUDE A LEECH REPELLENT?

My father T.H. Tehsin shot a number of sambar *Cervus unicolor* and thamin *Cervus eldi* in north-east India in the 1930s. One aspect of his observations is particularly interesting. The habitat of the thamin is full of leeches. He found a large number of leeches on the carcasses of sambar he had shot, but none at all on carcasses of thamin he had shot in the same locality. He inferred that the thamin exudes a chemical repellent (possibly salt) which keeps leeches at bay.

There are plans by conservation authorities to build up the wild population of the endangered thamin by releasing captive animals. Due to long isolation from their natural habitat, the leech repellent mechanism in captive thamin may have atrophied. Before releasing captive animals, this aspect should be studied in more detail.

August 13, 1991

RAZA TEHSIN

### 2. BROOD OF THE INDIAN FIELD MOUSE *MUS BOODUGA* IN AN ABANDONED BAYA NEST

On 14 April 1990, some village boys brought two baya nests from the Rakhal (Reserved forest) adjoining our camp site on the edge of Fulay village in Chhari Dhandh, Kutch. One of the nests had an unusual opening on its anterior end close to the point from where the nest is usually suspended. The opening was smaller than the usual nest entrance, and seemed to have been neatly cut at a later date.

The opening led to the egg chamber which on examination revealed a field mouse *Mus booduga* with two young ones, whose eyes were still closed. We left the nest undisturbed and hung it up in a safe corner. On examining it again the next day, we found that one more young had been littered in the night.

The adult mouse had by now got used to the

nest's new location and used to emerge to forage both in the tent and outside and would return to the brood, where it would remain most of the time. According to Prof. I. Prakash (pers. comm.), this is the first instance of *Mus booduga* breeding in an abandoned baya nest. We again came across a similar nest near one of our netting plots. The nest was suspended on an *Acacia nilotica* tree, about 2.5 m from the ground and had a similar opening leading into the egg chamber. A *Mus booduga* emerged from the nest, and when we examined it further, a brood of three young ones was noticed. The above two instances indicate a hitherto unrecorded nesting behaviour of the field mouse.

November 22, 1990

S. ASAD AKHTAR

J.K. TIWARI

### 3. ADDITIONS TO THE BIRDS OF ASSAM – BLACKNECKED GREBE *PODICEPS NIGRICOLLIS* BREHM

On 6 January 1991, I and a few other members of the Florican Society were counting birds in the Deeper Beel Wildlife Sanctuary near Guwahati as part of the Asian Waterfowl Census. At around 1100 hrs about 1000 ducks were seen settling in the eastern half of the beel. We immediately took our boat to the spot. Among the ducks, two birds caught my attention.

Using 20x binoculars I identified them as grebes, but they appeared much smaller than the great crested grebe *P. cristatus*, and also smaller

than the tufted ducks *Aythya fuligula* which were nearby. Soon they came out of the mixed flock of ducks and started diving, sometimes together, sometimes one after the other. On further observation, I noted the following characteristics: head (up to the eyes or just below), foreneck and back blackish or deep brown. Head (from around eyes to chin), breast and flanks white. The colour of the parts underwater were not seen. It was a pair of blacknecked grebes *Podiceps nigricollis* Brehm, in winter plumage, a first record for both Assam

and the whole of eastern India. The birds were seen in open water and observed for about 10 minutes.

According to the HANDBOOK OF BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN (Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. 1983), the blacknecked grebe is an uncommon winter visitor

to the Indian subcontinent, with just a few sporadic records from Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. The sighting is therefore the new easternmost locality for this species in the subcontinent.

January 19, 1991

A. CHOUDHURY

#### 4. RECOVERY OF A RUSSIAN-RINGED ROSY (WHITE) PELICAN *PELECANUS ONOCROTALUS* LINN. IN KUTCH, GUJARAT

On 10 November 1989, Alimamad Manjothi, Range Forester, saw a large dead bird in Medisar Rakhal (23°22' N, 69°30' E) near Niruna village of Bhuj taluka, Kutch, Gujarat. It had a ring on one leg bearing no. Moskwa KK 2398 which is at present with Forest Division, Bhuj. The bird was identified by M.K. Himmatsinhji as an immature white (rosy) pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* Linn.

On enquiry with the ICBP/IWRB Pelican Research Group we found that the bird was a rosy pelican ringed as a pullet on 29 July 1989 at the Ily delta in the lake Balkash area (45°22' N, 74°

08' E), former U.S.S.R. This would mean that the young bird had flown a distance of at least 2800 km within three months 12 days.

The rosy pelican is partly resident and was first recorded breeding in the Great Rann of Kutch in 1960 (Ali, S., *JBNHS* 57: 414). It is mainly a winter visitor to Pakistan (Sind, Baluchistan) and northern India from Punjab to Assam (Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Kutch, Saurashtra, north Gujarat, Andhra (Visakhapatnam) and Madras?).

November 8, 1990

S.N. VARU  
M.B. KHATRI

#### 5. POND HERON *ARDEOLA GRAYII* (SYKES) FEEDING ON BEES

While watching birds on the morning of 30 December 1990, close to Lalbagh Tank (12°57' N, 77°35' E) in Bangalore, we were attracted to four Indian pond herons *Ardeola grayii* perched on top of a 7 m tall Indian willow tree *Salix tetrasperma* Roxb., growing close to the tank edge. The willow tree was in full bloom and many small bees *Trigona leviseps* and rock bees *Apis dorsata* (Apidae : Hymenoptera) were observed visiting the willow flowers. The pond herons, perched precariously on the small end-branches close to the flowers, snapped their beaks at and swallowed

every small bee that came within striking distance. Surprisingly, the herons were not observed capturing the rock bees.

Pond herons are chiefly ground foragers and are known to feed on animal matter mainly aquatic in nature (HANDBOOK OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, Ali, S. and Ripley, S.D. 1987). The present observation of peculiar arboreal behaviour and diet of the bird is therefore of interest.

February 14, 1991

J.N. PRASAD  
J. HEMANTH

#### 6. PAINTED STORK *MYCTERIA LEUCOCEPHALA* (PENNANT) IN KERALA

On a visit to the Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala in October 1990, I observed a painted stork *Mycteria leucocephala* (Pennant) there on the 19th afternoon, feeding alongside a pair of whitenecked storks *Ciconia episcopus* at the edge of the Periyar reservoir. This was not far from the Edapalayam watch tower, by boat. I saw a solitary painted stork, presumably the same individual, on three other occasions during the next two days.

On the morning after the first sighting, it was

opposite the boat landing at Thekkady, again with whitenecked storks. That afternoon it was standing on one of the dead trees in the reservoir, off the Edapalayam landing. On the morning of 21 October it was back at the Thekkady boat landing, with a group of whitenecked storks. This sighting is the second record of the painted stork for Kerala.

March 7, 1991

KUMARAN SATHASIVAM